

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



July 30, 2022

Big Impact with Small Spring Flowering Bulbs

Catalogs and online advertisements are piquing our interest in spring flowering bulbs in the middle of summer. Planning for the next year allows time for exploring new types of flowers from bulbs. Some of my favorites are the minor bulbs. They are small in size but create impact when planted in groups. Several even bloom in late winter. Remember, they need to be planted in the fall.

The generic term “bulb” is used to refer to a group of plants that have different food storage structures to support life until the plant’s life cycle begins again. Different storage structures characterized by botanists are bulb, corm, tuber, tuberous root, and rhizome.

The scientific name of the following bulbs is included to make sure you find the plants described.

The snow crocus, *Crocus chrysanthus*, begins to bloom in late January to early February. The flowers are small and reach a height of 3 to 4 inches tall. The flower colors available range from white, purple, light blue, and yellow to flowers with two colors such as yellow and violet or purple and white. The leaves are grass-like. Watch for them because they bloom very early.

Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, has a little white, bell-shaped flower gracefully hanging down from each flower stem. The leaves are linear or strap-shaped. Plant height reaches up to 3

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inches. This little gem may bloom in February. Plant the snowdrops in an area where you pass every day or where they can be seen from a window inside the house to enjoy them even when it is cold outside.

Netted iris, *Iris reticulata*, has a single violet-blue flower 3 to 5 inches above the ground. The foliage is grass-like and very fine. This unusual, small iris blooms in late winter. Netted iris is a good choice for rock gardens.

Winter aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis*, has a pure yellow to bright gold, cuplike flower 1.5 inches across in early March. The unique foliage looks like a finely frilled, green collar under the flower. Plant height is around 3 inches. The best location for the winter aconite is in an area where the soil does not become too dry during the summer months. For the best visual effect in the landscape, plant the winter aconite in groupings. Snowdrops can be planted with the winter aconite.

Giant crocus or Dutch hybrid crocus, *Crocus* species and hybrids, have larger blossoms than the snow crocus. The giant crocus blooms in early spring but later than the snow crocus. The flower colors available include yellow, purple, white, and white combined with purple. The leaves are grass-like. Foliage reaches 6 inches tall.

Glory of the snow, *Chionodoxa luciliae*, has several small, star-shaped, blue or pink flowers, depending on the cultivar, with white centers on each flower stem. The height of the flower stem may reach 6 inches. Flowers begin to appear in late March to early April.

Striped squill, *Puschkinia scilloides*, has a flower spike with small white flowers. A deep blue stripe appears down the middle of each flower petal. The plant reaches 4 to 6 inches tall. Striped squill is great for naturalizing in a rock garden.

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Grape hyacinth, *Muscari armeniacum*, has cobalt-blue, bell-shaped flowers with a narrow white edge at the mouth. The flowers look like grape clusters. The foliage appears in the fall and persists through the winter. Blooms appear in April and the height of the flower stem reaches 4 to 6 inches. Grape hyacinth can be used in rock gardens and with other spring flowering bulbs.

Greek windflower, *Anemone blanda*, has a small daisy-like flower. Depending on the cultivar, the flower color is white, pink, or blue. This plant forms a small mound shape covered with flowers reaching 4 to 6 inches tall. The food storage structure for the Greek windflower is a rhizome. As soon as you receive the rhizome, plant it right away to prevent it from drying out; otherwise, the spring performance of the plant may be reduced.

Plant small spring blooming bulbs early enough in the fall to allow time for root growth before cold soil temperatures reduce plant growth. The bulbs discussed can be left in the soil all year and will return year after year.

Many bulbs are planted at a depth of two to three times the diameter of the bulb. Place the bulb in the hole with the growing point up; otherwise, the plant may not emerge from the ground. On some bulbs, the growing point end narrows at the top, and the bottom end is flat. Old roots may be attached to the bottom end of the bulb. If you are in doubt about the location of the growing point, place the bulb on its side.

Most bulbs do not require a fertilizer application at planting. Most bulbs should be fertilized with a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 at a rate of 1-2 lbs. per 100 sq. ft. when the foliage is emerging in spring. Plant bulbs in well-drained locations to prevent them from rotting. Most bulbs prefer a sunny location. The best show of color results when the same type of bulb is planted in groups.

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For more information about the minor bulbs, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480.

Annette's Tip:

The minor bulbs listed above make great plants to include with other spring flowering plants such as daffodils (*Narcissus*) and other spring perennials. The minor bulbs may be available locally or through catalogs or online.

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